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Miscellaneous

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The disappearance of provincial printed press: analysis of the causes and consequences based on the case study of Castile-La Mancha

Abstract

The current context and changes in the communicational paradigm in the last ten years lead to think we are experiencing a moment of transition that entails the end of mass media, like different studies have concluded. Among them, the most vulnerable product is the printed newspaper, which disappearance generates few doubts. However, immersed in this moment of change, we cannot yet evaluate what means to lose a journalistic model that has prevailed for over two centuries and a half as informational reference. From this perspective, the province of Cuenca, in Castile-La Mancha, one of the two in Spain which today no longer has a printed newspaper, offers us a unique scenario to approach what kind of medium positions as leader in its place. Using a mixed methodology, based on the review of documentary sources and contents analysis, we analyse a case study that aims to collect tendencies regarding proximity media. In this case, the switching from one platform to another has devaluated very relevant journalistic genres, such as the photo news or the editorial, but also some core practices in the

journalism, like the editing task on the material that arriving to the editorial offices.

Keywords

Newspaper, crisis, paper, local journalism, structure.

1. Introduction

The extinction of the printed newspaper stopped being a probability to become an irrefutable fact. Since the late 90s, there has been a succession of voices foretelling the end of the newspaper as we know it (Armentia, 2011; Edo, 2002; Fogel & Patiño, 2007; Martínez Albertos, 1997) delving into the structural crisis of the sector (Cagé, 2016; De Bustos & Casado, 2010; Díaz Nosty, 2013; Larrañaga, 2009). More recently, the study of researchers Martínez, Juanatey and Castellanos (2017) that, using econometric methods applied to the evolution of the diffusion of Galician newspapers, have delimited the end of printed editions in a temporal moment ranging between 2027 and 2028. The review of the structure of the local press, however, suggests that it will be a gradual process that, in fact, in some regions like the one concerning us here, Castile-La Mancha, it has begun already, overtaking all prognoses. In March 2012, Guadalajara turned into the first Spanish province without printed newspaper, the second one was Cuenca. The rationale is that the migration process of the printed to the

digital newspaper format is produced earlier whereas the advertising investment and the demand (in terms of diffusion and audience) are weaker, a situation that produces in Castile-La Mancha (Laguna *et al.*, 2016). Through the study of its mastheads, it is confirmed that there existed some conditioning factors that have determined the newspaper model, such as the geographical dispersion or the absence of a strong regional identity. However, we cannot consider it is an isolated scenario but rather the first of others about to come and, in any case, there seems to be a certain correlation between the provinces of smaller size and the reduction of mastheads.

Table 1: Relationship between provinces with fewer newspapers and less population.

PROVINCE	POPULATION	PRINTED NEWSPAPERS
Guadalajara	255,922	Without newspaper
Cuenca	200,976	Without newspaper
Huesca	219,205	1 newspaper and one edition
Zamora	177,027	1 newspaper
Palencia	162,260	1 newspaper and one edition
Avila	160,451	1 newspaper
Segovia	154,586	1 newspaper and one edition
Teruel	134,197	1 newspaper (public)
Soria	89,763	1 newspaper

Source: Own elaboration based on INE, *Noticias de la Comunicación* [News on Communication, National Statistics Institute], *El Libro Blanco de la Información 2017* [The White paper on Information 2017] and data by Sanz Hernando (2017).

At the moment, some provinces with similar or less population even keep more than one newspaper. In Huesca, a provincial newspaper is edited as well as an edition of *El Heraldo de Aragón*. In Castile and León three provinces (Palencia, Segovia and Salamanca) have a newspaper and an edition of the historical newspaper *El Norte de Castilla* (Sanz Hernando, 2017). On the other hand, in Avila there is only *Diario de Ávila* and Zamora maintains *La Opinión – El Correo de Zamora* but was not successful in consolidating the proposal of several local businessmen under the name *La Prensa de Zamora*, promoted in 2003 and closed one year later. Soria, which had two newspapers, has been the scenario of the re-foundation of both into a single publication, *Heraldo-Diario de Soria*, distributed since September 2017 along with the newspaper *El Mundo*. In Teruel only the *Diario de Teruel* remains with the singularity that it is the only one edited by a public entity depending on the Provincial Council Office. The newspaper from Ciudad Real *Lanza*, the other regional newspaper of public ownership edited in Spain, became a weekly publication in 2017.

Except for Teruel and the newspapers of Huesca, Segovia and Soria, the rest of the aforementioned belong to the communication group Promecal, also owner of the three regional newspapers still edited in Castile-La Mancha under the newspaper *La Tribuna* and which are distributed together with *La Razón*. The business group has launched in the past years several projects printed in weekly format (*El Día de Salamanca*, *El Día de León*, *El Día de Segovia*, *El Día de Soria*, *La Tribuna de Cuenca* and *La Tribuna de Guadalajara*), a strategy that could lead to the gradual conversion of the remaining newspapers. The division of local press of the *Grupo Zeta*, on the other hand, also seems threatened according to some news about the feasibility plan of the company¹, having doubts about the persistence of some local mastheads such as *El Periódico de Extremadura*, *El Periódico de Aragón* and *La Crónica de Badajoz*.

¹ “Grupo Zeta cerrará más medios tras Interviu” [Grupo Zeta will close more media after Interviu], Jordi Velert, *Economía Digital*, 09 January 2018. Retrieved from https://www.economiadigital.es/directivos-y-empresas/grupo-zeta-cierre-periodicos-regionales-interviu_529841_102.html.

This phenomenon is at a preliminary stage, but it has raised the scientific interest on the international field. Several studies have confirmed in an empirical manner that the disappearance of the local newspaper also entails some changes that have a direct reflection on the socioeconomic behaviour of affected communities. In the United States, where 216 local publications between 1996 and 2015 have disappeared (Gao, Lee & Murphy, 2018, p. 12), researchers have evidenced that the loss of the newspaper has led to a reduction of the civic commitment of citizens (Shaker, 2014) and an increase of the municipal debt (Gao, Lee & Murphy, 2018). Another study has emphasized that even when the newspaper that closes is of small size with 27,000 circulating copies –there are produced effects like less competitive local elections and less participation (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009). These arguments, even though they cannot determine the cause–effect relationship in a univocal manner, they do reinforce the relevance of newspapers over their areas of influence.

The changes experienced in the ways of conveying and consuming information suggest that the end of the printed newspaper is an irreversible process. First, because a public that acquires specific guidelines, dominated today by the online environment, would hardly return to the previous system (López García, 2015, p. 100). Secondly, because who initiate today in the information consumption already incorporate from the digital culture (AMI, 2018). Before this reality, it cannot be omitted that digital newspapers still face several challenges, among them, the frequent combination of the role of journalist and editor (Casero Ripollés, 2010), the leadership of technological companies compared to contents companies (Labio, 2017) and the low headcount of their staff, as a result of their hurdles to implement any payment system per content (Casero Ripollés, 2016). The question is clear: what is the future of the local press? Like Nielsen states, “local media have represented their area and have helped people to imagine themselves as part of a community, connected through the local media they share, united by something else than their geographical or political proximity, defined by the administrative limits” (2015, p. 1). A role that adopts new forms in the current communicational ecosystem, granting a new meaning to proximity (López, 2017, p. 122), although this means to attend the closest community while competing in the global-oriented market (Parratt, 2002).

This study aims to analyse the causes of the early extinction of the printed newspaper in Castile-La Mancha, since its two provinces represent a unique situation in Spain. Based on this objective, the goal is to collect the main changes produced when the newspaper has been replaced by a digital media, from the perspective of the informational offer and the typology of information. For this second objective, the case study applied to the province of Cuenca is adopted, an appropriate methodology when changes processes are analysed, where the situation context is essential and where the research and theory are still on preliminary stages (Jiménez Chaves, 2012). There are two hypotheses managed:

H1. The disappearance of the printed newspaper is due to the low demand of Castile-La Mancha inhabitants, both regarding the purchase of this product as well as its reading, although it is impacted by other conditioning factors.

H2. In the case of Cuenca, the digital newspaper does not offer the same type of context than the extinct printed newspaper, therefore the replacement of one medium for another one might have consequences.

Despite the difficulty to obtain generalizing results, characteristic of this methodological framework, we consider that this study can allow to identify tendencies and analyse some of the risks underlying the new model of digital journalism of proximity, especially in those geographic areas where only a single newspaper is maintained.

2. Methodology

According to the concept of media ecology, media are like “species” living in the same ecosystem and establish relationships between them (Scolari, 2015, p. 30). One technological

innovation or an emerging actor can alter its balance and it happened so, with the launching of Internet, which opened new ways for conveying information. We would only talk about the extinction of the interface then? According to the conclusion of the previously cited research, we would only be “standing before a new form of content consumption” (Martínez *et al.*, 2017, p. 92). However, the change not only impacts the platform but also the business model. It is necessary to consider that, often, the closure of the printed version also entails the closure of the journalistic company: from 2001 until 2016 up to 29 mastheads have disappeared (AMI, 2017) and along with them, editorial offices of relevance that could sustain thanks to the double track funding –readers and advertisers– still a minority in the digital medium. Like Laguna and López Villaverde indicate, “in this process of transit not only a physical object mutates, its aetiology and outlook. Instead, there is a qualitative change and it impacts the basic functions the printed medium has been fulfilling since its launching” (2017, p. 3760).

The methodology in this study is based on the Structure as discipline which uses several areas of knowledge and their interrelation (Reig, 2009). In order to trace the recent evolution of press, the study starts with the review of the original sources deposited in the provincial archives since the last research located that analyses press in the entire community analyses periods prior to the Civil War (Sánchez, 1991). The object of study and the subsequent fieldwork is contextualized with statistical sources (Berganza & García, 2005) where there has been track of magnitudes on audiences and media consumption, such as Marco General de Medios [Media in Spain: General Framework], the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [Centre for Sociological Research], INE [National Statistics Institute] and specialized publications such as *Noticias de la Comunicación* and the *Libro Blanco de la Prensa* of AEDE [White paper on Press].

The last section aims to evaluate the consequences of the disappearance of a provincial newspaper and in order to do this, it presents a comparison between two leading media in the Province of Cuenca. Regarding the printed newspapers, there is an analysis of the extinct *El Día de Cuenca*, the oldest in the province and the only one in the year 2011. The only datum available in the *OJD* [Office of Spreading Justification] about its publication corresponds to the year 2000, when 3,430 copies were sold daily. Within the digital offer, there has been selected the one positioned as leader in the number of visits according to *OJD Interactiva*, *Voces de Cuenca*, which in December 2017 it recorded an average of 10,912 daily visitors. It is an open access digital native promoted in 2009 by several journalists fired from *La Tribuna de Cuenca* after its closure.

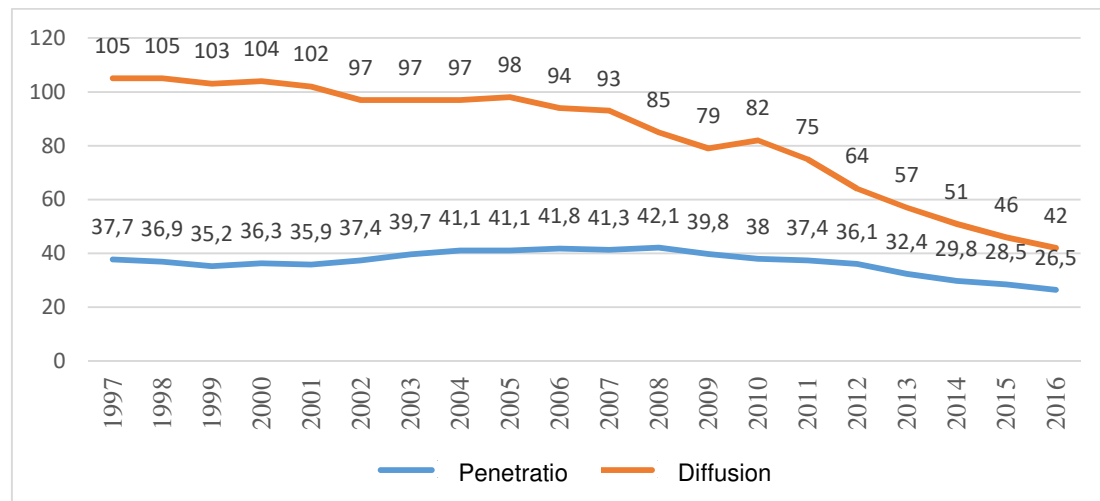
We use the content analysis according to Berelson proposal, “an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of the communication” (1952, p. 18). Data have been collected from copies/ days of a composed week, monitoring alternate days of six different months, thus avoiding that results could be altered by any internal or external circumstance in a sequential period of time. In the content analysis, the number of pieces was counted, and it has been indicated, whether they corresponded to an opinion or information content, the geographical scope they refer to, the topics and length. On the other hand, to measure the volume of in-house and external production of the medium we used, a methodology applied in other studies about proximity media as a model (Jerónimo, 2015), distinguishing between the following categories: within in-house production, there were observed news that have the authorship of a journalist as well as those where, in the text, there is reference to the fact it is exclusive information; regarding external production, these are understood as the news that coming from agencies, press notices and those where the origin is not possible to determine.

3. Context: the crisis of press

The steady decrease of diffusion data reveals that the press crisis is generalized and impacts the main countries of Europe, even those that, out of tradition, have recorded the greatest

numbers of press sales: in Finland, the diffusion index has reduced from 446 by every thousand inhabitants in 2001 to 206 copies in 2016; in Sweden, from 415 to 146 (AMI, 2018). In the Spanish case, in this period, we have moved from 4,107,959 copies sold every day to 1,995,207. Some authors (García Santamaría, 2015; Gómez Calderón, 2006) advocate that the crisis of newspapers in Spain is not recent but instead dates back to the end of the 90s when the sustained diffusion period started but new groups of readers were not achieved. The initiatives that companies and institutions promoted by the end of 2000 to stop the steady loss of followers among the young public (in 2003 AEDE and the Ministry of Education sign an agreement for the fostering of press reading at school; Fundación La Caixa promoted media literacy programs in high school centres of Madrid and Catalonia) were not successful in connecting to youth, whose interests have maintained outside the agenda (Tuñez, 2009). In 1999, the segment where the newspapers show a greater audience is the one ranging between 25 to 34 years old; ten years later the greater reach is presented between 45 to 54 years old; and in 2017 in the age range between 55 to 64 years old (AIMC, 2000, 2010, 2017). Namely, there existed a stable group of loyal readers that has aged concurrently with its medium of reference, without an equivalent mass to replace it.

Figure 1: Evolution of the diffusion and audience of newspapers in Spain.



Source: Own elaboration based on the *Informe Anual de la comunicación 2000-2001* [Annual Report on Communication 2000-2001], *El Libro Blanco de la Prensa 2016* [The White Papers on Press 2016] and the *Marco General de Medios 2005-2016* [Media in Spain: General Framework].

The apparition of Internet and the digitalization of newspapers after 1994 (Armañanzas, Díaz Noci & Meso, 1996) only complicate a model that was already at risk. The absence of a profitable business model in the online version has hindered journalistic companies to undergo a “pacific transition” from the analogical model to another one where the digital is an essential pillar (Salaverría, 2010, p. 242). By the end of the 90s, newspapers faced the dilemma of implementing payment systems by content in their online versions, even with the risk of losing audience in the web, or distributing content in a free manner, increasing the number of visits but without being able to monetize them.

Despite the evident symptoms of the market being at a standstill, the early 2000s were encouraging years in the implantation of new mastheads, both by local businessmen as well as within the expansion strategy of large communication groups. Among the novelties, there are newspapers such as *Diario de Valencia* (2000), *El Periódico de Alicante* (2001), *La Opinión*

de Granada (2003), *Heraldo de Castellón* (2003), *Granada Hoy* (2003), *La Prensa de Zamora* (2003), *El Correo de Málaga* (2003), *El Pueblo de Albacete* (2003), *El Día de Ciudad Real* (2003), *Noticias de La Rioja* (2004), *La Voz de Cádiz* (2004), *Diario de Noticias de Álava* (2004), *Málaga Hoy* (2004), *La Estafeta de Navarra* (2004) and *Noticias de Gipuzkoa* (2005). Xosé López (2006, p. 90) concluded that, “business is the priority in increasingly competed local market.” Only six of these fifteen newspapers still exist today, a result that suggests that the growth in the offer would be linked to the economic prosperity of the moment and not always to the journalistic interests (Soengas, Rodríguez & Abuín, 2014, p. 106). We must consider that the advertisement investment on newspapers reached its greater interannual increases between 2003 and 2007.

Table 2: Evolution of the advertising investment in press.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Millions of €	1,593.8	1,531.2	1,496.0	1,583.7	1,666.4	1,790.5	1,894.4	1,507.9	1,174.1	1,124.4
Interannual Variance	-3.9%	-2.2%	5.8%	5.8%	5.2%	7.4%	5.8%	-20.4	-22.1%	-4.2%

Source: Own elaboration based on annual reports of Infoadex (2001-2010).

The arrival of the economic crisis in the year 2008 produces a drastic drop on the investment volume that has been sustained to a considerable extent by Real State and contributions of public administrations (APM, 2018).

4. The case of Castile-La Mancha

4.1. Mediatic consumption

In the following table we establish a relationship between two variables, the diffusion index and the percentage of digital exclusive readers, to observe the unequal behaviour of Spanish regions.

Table 3: Relationship between the diffusion index of newspapers and the reading of digital press.

	% exclusive digital reader 2016	Diffusion index printed press 2008	Diffusion index printed press 2016
Navarre	1.1	144	90
Asturias	2.5	122	74
Basque country	5.1	129	74
Galicia	4.5	102	68
Cantabria	1.9	119	63
Balearic Islands	2.2	115	52
Castile and León	5	97	52
La Rioja	0.4	102	51
Catalonia	13.9	97	50
Aragon	2.9	86	43
Madrid	17.2	104	39
Canary Islands	4.7	69	28
Valencian Community	10	62	27
Andalusia	18.5	60	24
Extremadura	2.5	54	23
Murcia	2.6	51	23
Castile-La Mancha	4.9	44	19

Source: Own elaboration based on *El Libro Blanco de la Información 2017* [The White Papers on Information 2017].

As observed, Madrid and Catalonia, with the great cities, leader the consumption of digital press, at the same time they maintain above the national average in diffusion (43 copies in 2016), being the environments with more solid press structures (in Catalonia 18.88% of daily copies are sold; in Madrid the 12.79%). Another evidence is that the five communities that present the lowest percentage of digital readers are La Rioja, Navarre, Cantabria, Balearic Islands and Asturias; coinciding with those that have historically registered the highest diffusion indexes, above the 100 copies, which indicates a greater strength of the paper format and would confirm that in environments with a stronger press system the transition to the digital environment is not as pronounced. In the other extreme there are Murcia, Extremadura and Castile-La Mancha, which show both a low diffusion index as well as a low percentage of exclusive digital readers, even though this last digital reading is at a middle point.

The mediatic ecosystem found in Castile-La Mancha is an example of the theories linking press consumption with the socio-educational level. In the 70s, American sociologists Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) formulated the theory of knowledge gap hypothesis that demonstrated the relationship between social classes, habitat and mediatic consumptions. Thus, the preference for television as informational reference is more marked whereas the educational level is lower, due to what authors call the informational self-deprivation. According to this concept, the difficulty of comprehension – and not the limits in access – is what generates lack of interest. Also, Díaz Nosty (2005) has confirmed the divergence in the informational consumption between the countries of the North and South of Europe, first, and between the communities of the North and South of Spain, later.

To explain its causes, we must go back to the time where the private market of press configures in a political system of freedoms. In 1982 in Castile-La Mancha there are 121 illiterate individuals by every thousand inhabitants registered, compared to the 70 of the national average. According to the *Sondeo sobre Opinión Pública en Castilla-La Mancha* [Survey about Public Opinion in Castile-La Mancha] (CIS, 1984), 80% of the population is considered ‘somewhat or not informed at all’ about the activity developed by the executive of the Autonomous Community. There are two causes: 37% of them consider that the Executive informs little, but more than half of them, 59%, is not informed because they do not follow the information. From respondents, 61% admit not reading the newspaper ever or almost never, compared to 59% who listen to the radio at least twice or three times per week and the 70% watching television daily.

Table 4: Illiterate/no studies population older than 16 years old. Percentages.

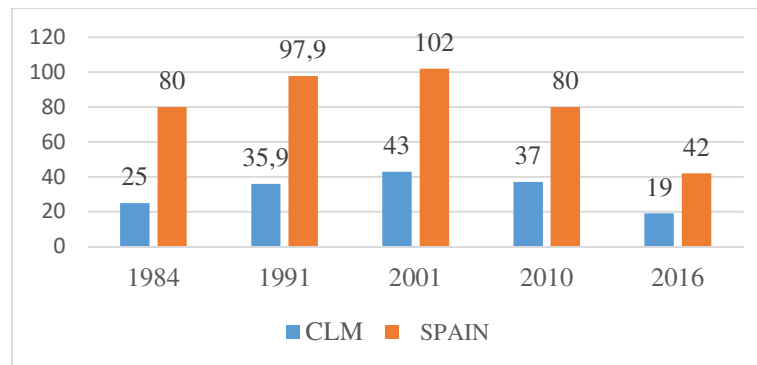
	1991	2000	2010
Castile-La Mancha	31.74	26.80	17.55
Albacete	37.60	29.14	18.73
Ciudad Real	28.00	28.30	19.60
Cuenca	37.30	25.77	21.48
Guadalajara	23.90	15.95	8.58
Toledo	31.20	27.78	17.21
Spain	20.30	16.41	10.60

Source: Own elaboration based on INE's data.

The data from INE reveal that in 1991 still a third of population did not have studies, being the region of the country with the highest percentage together with Extremadura and Murcia. Two of the three provinces with greater level of illiteracy in Spain are located in Castile-La Mancha and they are Albacete and Cuenca. On the other hand, the region is below the population's average with higher education degrees, perhaps due to the late creation of the

Autonomic University in 1985. Still in 2010, Cuenca presented the lowest percentage of population with higher education levels in Spain, 12.58%, a number that was already exceeded in the 90 in four autonomous communities: Basque Country (16.58%), Navarre (15.20%), Madrid (15.10%) and La Rioja (12.60%). Again, they are the ones that have maintained higher levels of diffusion. Castile-La Mancha has always occupied the last place in press diffusion, far below national averages.

Figure 2: Evolution of Diffusion index.



Source: Own elaboration from the research of Ramos (1989), the *Informe Anual de la comunicación 2000-2001* [Annual Report on Communication 2000-2001] and *El Libro Blanco de la Prensa 2016* [The White Papers on Press 2016].

The predominance of the audiovisual platform is confirmed with the penetration data. In the year 2003 in Castile-La Mancha the peak of daily minutes dedicated to watching television is reached—291 minutes, almost five hours— when the national average does not reach four hours, with 226 minutes (AIMC, 2004).

4.2. Recent evolution of press (1984-2016)

An historical approach allows us to locate four stages. The first one extends from 1984 until 1990 and is characterized by the restructuration in the market after the disappearance of the *Prensa del Movimiento* [Movement's Press] and the arrival of the first private initiatives. In Cuenca, only one newspaper belonged to the *Cadena de Medios de Comunicación Social del Estado* [Media Network of the State], *Diario de Cuenca*, which in 1983 had a diffusion of 1,945 copies and its accounts showed a deficit of 50 million pesetas (De las Heras, 2000). After its disappearance, *El Día de Cuenca* was launched, promoted by a local businessman. In Albacete, since 1973 there was published *La Verdad de Albacete* and in 1984 the oldest newspaper of Castile-La Mancha was born, *La Tribuna de Albacete*, although it is only 33 years old². In Ciudad Real, the public daily newspaper *Lanza* is edited since 1943 and in Guadalajara the newspaper *La Prensa Alcarreña* was published for only three years. In Toledo, there was not a provincial newspaper until 1987, only with editions of *Ya* and *El Alcázar*. Both the province of Toledo as well as Guadalajara have been very difficult markets for press due to their closeness to the Spanish capital and the high penetration of the press of reference. Therefore, there are four newspapers that endure throughout these first years of autonomy. In a second stage, since from 1997 until 2000, the first local communication groups would gestate and there is produced, faintly still, the first competition for the existing newspapers with the implantation of *La Tribuna* in Ciudad Real, Guadalajara, Cuenca and Toledo.

² It is noteworthy that in all regions there is a century old newspaper: *El Norte de Castilla* (1854), *Levante-EMV* (1872), *El Comercio de Asturias* (1878), *La Vanguardia* (1881), *La Voz de Galicia* (1882), *La Rioja* (1889), *Heraldo de Aragón* (1895), *El Correo de Andalucía* (1899), *Diario Montañés* (1902), *Diario de Navarra* (1903), *La Verdad de Murcia* (1903), *El Pueblo Vasco*, precedent of *El Correo* (1910); or almost one hundred year old like *El Periódico de Extremadura* (1923).

Like it happened all over Spain, the context of economic growth in the early 2000s was perceived as a business opportunity for the press sector, which translated into the birth of new mastheads. Thus, in 2006 fifteen newspapers were published, a period marked by the over-dimensioned offer. Most of these newspapers were property of the two communication groups in Castile-La Mancha: one of them is *Grupo El Día*, founded by the editor Santiago Mateo with the newspaper *El Día de Cuenca*, that even had five provincial newspapers and one regional television with five local offices; the other one is *Promecal*, a group from Burgos that in 2002 acquires the five mastheads of *La Tribuna*, owned by Antonio Miguel Méndez Pozo. The arrival of recession in 2008 and the subsequent closure of ten newspapers (plus the reconversion to a weekly basis of *Nueva Alcarria* and of *Lanza*), establish the fourth stage by emphasizing that the interests of media were sometimes distanced from the strictly journalistic as shown by the incursion of Real State companies in the market of media (Galletero-Campos, 2019).

Table 5: Relationships between publications and Real State companies Castile-La Mancha.

Publication	Owner company
<i>El Pueblo de Albacete</i>	<i>Corporación HMS Hermasan S.L.</i>
<i>Guada News</i>	<i>Proyecto inmobiliario Alvargómez</i>
<i>La Voz de la Sagra</i>	<i>Grupo Francisco Hernando Contreras S.L.</i>
<i>Guadalajara 2000</i>	<i>Parques Empresariales Gran Europa S.A.</i>
<i>El Decano</i>	<i>Teleoro Medios S.L., property of Grupo Urbas</i>
<i>Global Castilla-La Mancha, Global Henares y Nueva Alcarria</i>	<i>Grupo Rayet S.A.</i>
<i>Noticias Guadalajara</i>	<i>Gestesa Desarrollos Urbanos S.L. and Lábaro Grupo Inmobiliario S.A.</i>

Source: Mercantile Registry.

At the same time, the large businessmen of communication in Castile-La Mancha – Santiago Mateo, Antonio Miguel Méndez Pozo and Domingo Díaz de Mera, owner of *Green Publicidad* and *Medios S.A.* and promoter of three newspapers– appear in the list of cessations and nominations of *CR Aeropuertos S.L.*, the society promoter of the Airport of Ciudad Real, declared in bankruptcy proceeding in 2010, two years after its opening. The crash of the Real State bubble in 2008 dragged communication companies along.

4.3. Some conditioning factors of the market

It is not casual that the only two provinces in Spain that do not have a newspaper are located in one of the most unpopulated areas of Europe, baptised at some point as the “Spanish Lapland”³. For Sáez, Pinilla and Ayuda (2001) the demographic decline comes from a long process where these regions were not able to adapt to the structural changes impacting economy in the industrialization process and capitalist development: “Their initial situation made them less competitive than other areas of the same country or region, therefore they entered into a degenerative dynamic” (Sáez *et al.*, 2001, p. 215) The hurdles of making the activity profitable and of keeping the competitive standards could also apply to the press market. The geography and demography of the region, with 919 municipalities whereas 69.5% have less than 1.000 inhabitants, would raise the price of newspaper distribution. In fact, the *Asociación Española de Editoriales de Publicaciones Periódicas* [Spanish Association of Periodical Publication Publishers] has denounced this same year that the rates of *Correos* [National Post

³ “*La Laponia española queda entre Cuenca y Guadalajara*” [The Spanish Lapland is located between Cuenca and Guadalajara], Sofía Pérez Mendoza, *eldiario.es*, 16/11/2014. Retrieved from https://www.eldiario.es/sociedad/Espana-desaparece_o_323717749.html.

Service company] for 2018 were 30% higher for citizens living in less populated areas, a measure they consider discriminatory for these populations⁴.

The regional economy is another conditioning factor that has established the ceiling of the advertising market, very different from that of other more industrialized regions and with companies that reach higher invoicing volumes (Fundación Horizonte XXI, 2011). According to the data of the Central Directory of Companies of the INE [National Statistics Institute], 80% of the companies of the region are freelancers or societies with less than two employees, we could call them micro-SMB. Regarding purchase capacity, the citizen of Castile-La Mancha also positions below the average. The net annual income per capita in 2015 was 8.731 Euros, when the national average is positioned in 10.708 Euros (INE, 2016).

Another distinctive feature of the structure of press is the impossibility of consolidating a regional medium common to the five provinces. The initiatives about it, *Las Noticias de Castilla-La Mancha* (1998–2000), *Metro Directo Castilla-La Mancha* (2005–2009) and *El Día de Castilla-La Mancha* (2012–2013), did not prosper. According to the *Study N°3093 Postelectoral Elecciones Autonómicas 2015 [Post-electoral Autonomic Elections 2015]* (CIS, 2015), only 1.9% of population prioritizes their regional identity before the national identity, a percentage that is surpassed only in Castile and León. One symptom is the high penetration of national press in this region. There are only three communities, without including Madrid, where one national-circulation newspaper is sold the most: Castile and León (the second one is *El Norte de Castilla*), Andalusia (the second one is *Ideal* of Granada) and Castile-La Mancha, where the three most sold newspapers have a national scope, as confirmed on the following table.

Table 6: Diffusion numbers of newspapers in Castile-La Mancha.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<i>La Tribuna de Albacete</i>	3,697	3,337	3,183	3,132	3,203	3,124	3,707	3,580	3,185
<i>La Tribuna de Ciudad Real</i>	3,882	3,574	3,421	3,343	2,733	2,541	2,454	2,382	2,187
<i>La Tribuna de Toledo</i>	1,278	1,190	1,069	1,229	1,783	1,937	2,551	2,402	2,185
<i>La Tribuna de Talavera</i>	970	730	810	909	1,127				
<i>El Día de C-LM</i>					3,973	3,186			
<i>Nueva Alcarria</i>	1,567	1,300	1,203	1,198	1,072				
<i>La Verdad</i> (Albacete)			3,014	2,768	2,154	1,314			
TOTAL REGIONAL	11,394	10,131	12,700	12,579	16,045	12,102	8,712	8,364	7,557
<i>ABC</i>	9,807	9,630	8,287	7,211	6,229	5,505	5,033	4,457	3,873
<i>El País</i>	13,175	12,033	10,389	10,297	7,781	6,730	5,870	4,942	4,232
<i>El Mundo</i>	10,189	9,228	7,748	7,232	6,063	5,086	3,847	3,094	2,586
<i>La Razón</i>	8,819	7,237	6,712	6,237	8,704	9,035	8,899	8,607	7,825
TOTAL NATIONAL	41,990	38,128	33,136	30,977	28,777	26,356	23,649	21,100	18,516
<i>As</i>	14,166	13,496	13,073	11,810	10,160	8,610	8,088	7,154	6,722
<i>Marca</i>	12,532	11,696	11,784	10,355	8,594	6,854	6,692	5,550	4,682
TOTAL SPORTS	26,698	25,192	24,857	22,165	18,754	15,464	14,780	12,704	11,404
TOTAL	80,082	73,451	70,693	65,721	63,576	53,922	47,141	42,168	37,477

Source: Own creation from *OJD*.

⁴ “AEEPP denuncia a Correos ante la CNMC porque sus nuevas tarifas discriminan a 22 millones de españoles” [AEEPP reports Correos before the CNMC because their new tariffs discriminate 22 million Spanish], corporate website of the Asociación Española de Editoriales de Publicaciones Periódicas [Spanish Association of Periodical Publication Publishers], 7 March 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.aepp.com/noticia/3207/noticias-aepp/aepp-denuncia-a-correos-ante-la-cnmc-porque-sus-nuevas-tarifas-discriminan-a-22-millones-de-espanoles.html>.

In 2006, moment when more publications coexisted, the total diffusion in the region was of 77,985 copies per day, of which 52.97% corresponded to national press and 34.7% to sports press, a sample of the meagre reach of the provincial press. This reduced market share would explain the scarce investment of the Spanish great communication groups –*Vocento, Unidad Editorial, Prensa Ibérica, Grupo Zeta*– in newspapers of the autonomous community. During the 90s, *Grupo 16* kept an edition of *Diario 16 CLM* (1994–1997) and for a time it edited *La Voz del Tajo* (1991–1996), both without much success considering their duration. On the other hand, only *La Verdad de Albacete* belonged to *Editorial Católica* and then to *Vocento*, but in short, it was an edition of the newspaper from Murcia for Albacete. The edition of *ABC* for Castile-La Mancha is also property of *Vocento*.

The causes of the early extinction of the printed press in Castile-La Mancha are therefore explained through factors such as the predominating audiovisual culture, the press audience below the average, the scarce diffusion, the high penetration of the national and sports press, and an advertising market sustained by the small local commerce. Lastly, it must be noted that the lack of interest towards local affairs and the preference for the audiovisual model are aspects that have barely been altered by the offer of media today in the digital environment, as revealed by the consumption data of the two last studies elaborated by CIS [Centre for Sociological Research] for Castile-La Mancha.

Table 6: Mediatic consumption of the citizen from Castile-La Mancha.

Besides the sports press, do you read the newspaper (in paper format or on Internet)?		How often have you followed the political and electoral information during the campaign?		
Every day	Ever or almost never		Every day	Ever or almost never
18.1%	60%	Newspaper	15.8%	61.7%
‘Do you listen or watch the news on the radio or the TV?’		Television	54.7%	12.9%
71.4%	4.8%	Radio	16.2%	59.3%

Source: Data collected from the Autonomic Barometer III Nº 2956 2012 (left) and the Post-electoral Study nº 3093 Autonomic Elections 2015. Castile-La Mancha (right).

Despite the easy access provided by Internet and its free nature, the digital environment wouldn't have cut the divergences produced between geographic areas; on the contrary, “with the launching of new media and contents, the likelihood that the gap increased is higher, thus increasing the differences between the best and worst equipped in information and knowledge” (Díaz-Nosty, 2005, p. 36). If the average circulation of a provincial newspaper (3,000 copies (Table 7)) is multiplied by a rotation index of 5.2⁵, the result is an average of 15,600 readers per newspaper. The digital newspaper leader in visits, *Voces de Cuenca*, does not even reach this number, keeping an average of 11,586 daily visitors during 2017, according to *OJD Interactiva*. In this same line, another study performed on a sample of digital versions of local newspapers confirmed that those positioned on areas where the diffusion index is higher (Galicia, Navarre, Catalonia) show more extensive reading periods, which could indicate that the reading habit is transferred to the digital field (Galletero-Campos & Jerónimo, 2019).

5. The new informational offer: the digital newspaper

In fact, the low structural demand and the recession context left the autonomous community with only three regional newspapers that are not even commercialized in an independent

⁵ The rotation index in Castile-La Mancha corresponds to 2009 since the subsequent *Libros Blancos de la Prensa* [The White Papers on Press] of AEDE do not offer that disaggregated datum by communities.

manner, but instead are part of a joint offer when purchasing a national newspaper. This leads to thinking about what are the consequences of not having a newspaper on the affected populations? Can we conclude that the new digital newspaper is equivalent? Has the reader access to the same type of product? The result of the content analysis of seven alternate days of *El Día de Cuenca* and *Voces de Cuenca* allows to evaluate to what extent there has been a transposition of the journalistic model. A first approach towards both media revealed the differences in the editorial structure. In its last year, the newspaper's staff consisted of six senior managers, eight news writers editors, a correspondent in the province, two photographers and two sports collaborators. On the other hand, in the selected digital media the organization chart is composed of a director, an editor-in-chief, three news writers and a salesman; no photographer is included in the staff.

As a result of the inequality of human resources, the volume of informational pieces is rather different: in the printed media an average of 53 daily news is registered –without considering formats such as brief pieces and photo news, of which an equivalent in the digital format was not located–, while in the *Voces de Cuenca* the average of pieces per day is 25, which are the ones included in the cover template. The greatest similarities are found in the theme of news: politic and social information are predominant in both media. Differences are noted in the sports content though, which is due to the lack of specialized writers. *El Día* edited a special sports supplement that reached 51% of the total pieces of that day; in *Voces de Cuenca*, on the other hand, the greatest percentages are positioned from Friday to Sunday, but do not exceed 22%.

The results of the content analysis lead to describing the trends that follow:

5.1. The coverage area: towards the hyperlocal medium

It may be concluded that the digital medium strictly attends to its local community: it does not have employees outside the capital, and it does not reserve a space for provincial and regional information, which are fixed sections of a newspaper. The area of coverage of news in *Voces de Cuenca* is, essentially, the city of Cuenca, to which 80% of information refers to, compared to 12% of regional scope and coming from notices of institutions or agencies' teleprinters. The international information is practically non-existent: in four out of the seven days analysed, no news of this kind is published. However, the most relevant data is the decrease of current breaking news at provincial scope. In the newspaper, coverages of the three areas of the province are developed thanks to readers assigned to the Province section and the presence of correspondents. In the digital format, the provincial breaking news are relegated, losing a wider perspective of the agenda and also a cohesion element, more necessary in a region of strong dispersion like this province, with 238 municipalities.

5.2. The devaluation of some journalistic genres

Although the digital platform presents many advantages, *Voces de Cuenca* barely uses multimediality and hypertextuality, two of the criteria to determine the level of dynamism of a digital medium (Orihuela & *Novos Medios*, 2005, p. 45). It is observed that the structure of sections and the content of a conventional newspaper, based on pictures and texts, are reproduced. *El Día de Cuenca* grants great relevance to the photograph, by dedicating complete pages and sometimes the back cover to the graphic current news. On the other hand, in the digital format most of images are not exclusive (on the same date, they can also be viewed on other digital media). The texts on the on-line newspaper are shorter than in the physical newspaper, in compliance with the editorial standards on Internet (Salaverría, 1999). Overall, it could be inferred that the digital platform is an impoverished version of the traditional newspaper. As a positive aspect, the update and live broadcasts of specific events are validated, such as the plenary sessions of the Local Government.

Regarding the journalistic genres, the opinion genres do not reach on Internet the relevance they have on the paper nor are they among the most read news (Edo, 2002). *Voces de Cuenca* does not publish editorials and the opinion articles it disseminates, do not have a fixed regularity and depend on personalities of the local circle for content supply. In fact, in only one of the seven days analysed an opinion article was uploaded to the website and it was not exclusive of this medium, but instead was also spread on other digital media. On the other hand, *El Día de Cuenca* published three editorials daily, a vignette, gloss column and letters to the director.

5.3. The decrease of in-house production

The analysis confirms an excessive dependency of the information coming from press offices and agencies. The volume of news of in-house elaboration in the newspaper is about 40% (between 33.33% on the day with less volume and the 56.52% on the day with more original content); in neither of the days observed the volume is below a third of information. On the other hand, on the digital platform, the average of in-house content is 22.86% and in four out of seven days the news authored by an editor are below 20%.

The agency pieces are more numerous in the paper format newspaper, a fact explained, as perceived when crossing data, by the diffusion of national and international information through teleprinter. In the digital version the agencies news are scarce, positioning below 10%. Lastly, there is a third group that corresponds to that information that is published under the generic name of the medium and that come from press notices since they are not exclusive. This group of news represents 37% of the information of *El Día de Cuenca* and 68% in the digital platform.

In this kind of news another factor outstands, and it is the length of information. In the printed newspaper, the themes authored by the editor and, therefore, elaborated in-house are section opening information that either use double or full page. Thus, value to differential information is granted. In the digital version, there are no differences in the hierarchization of these in-house news. Furthermore, it is confirmed that the length of the news authored by editors is sometimes less than that of the notes issued by offices. Namely, already elaborated information coming to the editorial offices no longer adopt minor formats –brief pieces or columns, like the printed newspaper– but instead they are disseminated in their full length, considering the unlimited space offered by the digital media.

6. Conclusions

The extinction of the local newspaper is not circumscribed to a geographical environment. There is a decrease of sales across Europe and USA where several studies have delved into the consequences of their disappearance for the local community. This case study, which is not comparable to other areas of high indexes of diffusion and with strong journalistic companies, offers guidance about how this digital transition impacts provinces with less population and where there is barely a single newspaper left. Castile-La Mancha has historically been the Spanish Autonomous Community with the lowest dissemination index in the country and the provinces of Cuenca and Guadalajara are those with more demographic dispersion; it is not surprising that the disappearance of the newspaper started in them. The closure of their provincial newspapers is not but an additional symptom of the depopulation that impacts the area. All in all, it is about a public service that stops being available since its ownership and management lies in the hands of private companies, subjected to market and profitability criteria. The low level of press reading, dragged since the 80s, is characteristic of this population and maintains in the new digital newspaper, despite the facilities of distribution.

The content analysis of both media has shown some relevant differences in the informational offer available for the population of Cuenca. The data confirm that there is a reduction on the information regarding regions; the digital newspaper deals with what

happens on the capital but the element of cohesion the newspaper represented when offering a daily provincial panoramic picture, is lost. According to the last census of the Media Observatory *MediaCom*, in larger size populations some digital local newspapers have emerged (3 in total) but there are areas where there are gaps regarding information of proximity.

The second issue is the tendency towards progressively shorter texts and the absence of opinion genres. In this market, the digital newspapers of local scope could evolve towards a format closer to the news website than the traditional medium, with even shorter texts, where there predominates the services content and designed for its consumption through the mobile phone.

Lastly, the excessive dependency on contents coming from communication offices produced in *Voces de Cuenca* is worth mentioning. There is an unbalance between the in-house production and the content generated by others, a fact that is explained by the inequality of the workforce. Despite the daily update of an average of 25 news on the digital newspaper, data reveal that many of them are not original and are published just as they come, which suggest work from the editorial office and not in field. Moreover, this trend alerts about the power communication offices currently have, as their contents are frequently published in their entirety. As Chomón Serna (2017) indicates, in the digital newspapers, this offer of a regular information based on the public agenda seems to be enough to keep the number of users; this is the case with *Voces de Cuenca*.

The results reinforce the idea pointed out by the researchers Gao, Lee and Murphy (2018, p. 41): The changes in the way of consuming news complicate the return of the newspapers in those places where they have disappeared, but the new media are not always a good replacement. And they add: "In the long term, perhaps a balance can be achieved, whereas these online organizations hire local reporters and adapt their news to local areas" (*Ibid.*). In the meantime, it is relevant to investigate about what are the effects of this change of model and about how to face them because, based on the data about diffusion, the gradual disappearance of the paper format will not take long.

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